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SUBJECT: WHY WADE WON

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROY L. WHITAKER, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Defying predictions, President Abdoulaye Wade crushed all comers in the February 25 election. Senegalese disagree if there was fraud and on the degree of registration manipulation, but all concur President Wade had the money, machinery and message to win. Wade's charisma and an inconsequential opposition convinced self-interested voters to reward him for his grand projects and for his promise that &the best is yet to come8. END SUMMARY.

THE PDS STEAMROLLER

¶2. (C) Commenting that election results rank-ordered candidates by wealth, recent ministerial-rank Wade advisor Bassirou Sarr called money a key component of President Wade,s victory. With it, Wade and his Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) were able to run a massive electoral machine that created networks of supporters able to reach every corner of the country. Sarr said Wade skillfully divided the opposition by giving money to smaller independent candidates to split the vote of stronger rivals Idrissa Seck and Socialist Ousmane Tanor Dieng. Professor Boubacar Diop, Cheikh Anta Diop University historian and a former teacher,s union leader, underlined that an increase in teacher, civil servant and military salaries just prior to the elections did not hurt the President at all.

THE OPPOSITION THAT WASN,T

¶3. (C) &Calling them weak is to admit there actually was an opposition8 wryly commented Forum Civil Coordinator Mouhamed Mbodj. Since its 2000 defeat, Mbodj maintained, the Socialist Party (PS), has not adapted to being out of power, has failed to present itself as credible alternative to the PDS, remains mistrusted by the electorate and is led by an uninspiring gray apparatchik. Mbodj assailed the meek strategy of trying to be a highbrow &republican opposition8 saying people could not identify with it as a vehicle for discontent. Attorney Demba Cire Bathily, Amnesty International's President in Senegal, agreed, describing the opposition over the last seven years as &inconsequential8 and incoherent. He complained that they never faced down Wade on any subject even during major financial scandals. He faulted the opposition as well for not coalescing around a leader with star wattage to match Wade, and criticized them for failing to present credible or "stirring" alternatives.

WADE: THE GREAT COMMUNICATOR

¶4. (C) Everyone agrees Wade ran a great campaign: out of 15 candidates he was the only one who really knew how to appeal to the hopes and dreams of a largely illiterate and rural

electorate. Diop says Wade changed the political landscape, replacing the old system with a well run, dynamic and vibrant machine. He exploited his bully pulpit and state-controlled media throughout the country while deftly timing the opening of major projects, such as a new (if not yet functioning) university or bridge to coincide with elections. Wade also extended Radio Television Senegal's (RTS,s) reach all the way into Europe and throughout West Africa, Sarr noted, reaching Senegal's large immigrant community who in turn called families back in Senegal urging them to vote for Wade.

WADE: THE ARCHITECT

¶15. (C) Running under the slogan &let,s continue to build Senegal together,& Wade was able to tout infrastructure projects into an election victory. Dakar is in the throes of major construction in readiness for a hoped-for 2008 Organization of the Islamic Conferences (OIC) summit, and much of the countryside has benefited from enough new and visible schools, clinics, rural lighting, roads and bridges to make people believe Wade is a man who can deliver on promises. In fact, Wade,s campaign published a glossy 94-page brochure with all of his accomplishments, which contrasted the number of kindergartens, schools, hospitals, health centers, roads, bridges and other infrastructure completed between 1960 and 2000 with those completed during Wade,s first term (2000) 2007).

A SELF-CENTERED ELECTORATE

¶16. (C) Mbodj credits the rural population for utilitarianism in knowing what they want and how to get it. Long ago they understood Wade was prepared to share the pie and believed support for him would translate into concrete improvements in

DAKAR 00000554 002 OF 002

their lives. In turn Wade tapped into the Senegalese voter's "opportunistic nature." Further concrete successes that President Wade built on include free caesarians for rural women, scholarships for all university students, low inflation, tripling of the national budget through better income tax collection, and reduction of corporate tax from 33 to 25 percent. Mbodj and Diop agree that while Wade failed to live up to many of his grander 2000 electoral promises, the opposition was unable to effectively articulate alternative programs. They also agree that people were generally uninterested or unable to comprehend the subtle debates among opposition parties.

FRAUD? MAYBE, MAYBE NOT

¶17. (C) &Not transparent,& not democratic,& manipulation of the voter registry,& &imperfections& and &dysfunctional& are all terms we hear to describe the elections, but few, other than some diehards directly engaged in the opposition campaigns, argue they were not fundamentally free and fair. Amnesty's Bathily accused the Interior Ministry of being deliberately slow to give out voter registration cards in areas where they knew the PDS was weak, and Mbodj questioned how it was possible for only 3.4 million voters to get registration cards out of an eligible electorate of five million people who had applied for them up to a year ago.

¶18. (C) Mbodj suspects that in hindsight Wade,s victory was largely based on the vote of the generally ignored rural population whom nobody bothered to poll or question prior to the elections. He faults the intellectual elite for marginalizing this group who saw enough improvements in their lives and no credible alternative to keeping Wade in power for another five years. "Walfadjri" group chairman Sidi Lamine Niasse told us "everthing" Wade has done in office was designed to assure first his place, and then perhaps the legacy of his family, in the Senegalese presidency. An American citizen who travels often throughout the country tells us that during the campaign, poor folk climbing into a

bush taxi almost anywhere in the country would find an older, probably distinguished looking gentleman who would offer, but not press, information and counsel on what Wade had done for the country.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) This might be seen as manipulation, but it also shows awareness, empathy, care and concern for a population that long felt neglected by government. Wade had, it now seems clear, carefully built his re-election bid from the very beginning of his presidency. Post-election calm and the distressed but nonetheless muted rhetoric of the defeated opposition attest to the fact that Wade ran a first-class campaign. Not even his most fervent supporters were predicting such a wipeout. While we have talked of money and manipulation, meanwhile, we should not assume this was not welcomed by the rural poor. END COMMENT.

¶10. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar's classified website at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.

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